

TIBETAN MOTHERS OF THREE GENERATIONS: A HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD NECKLACE

Tshe dbang rdo rje ཅེ་དབང་ར་རྟེ་ (Caixiangduojie 才项多杰)

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'Brug mo skyid འབྲུག་མོ་སྒྲིད་ (Zhoumaoji 周毛吉)

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ABSTRACT

Accounts of a hundred-year-old necklace (~1920) illustrate a Tibetan family's life changes and issues, especially mother-daughter transmissions, in Khri ka (Guide) County, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. The accounts were collected by visiting, observing, and interviewing family members from 2010 to 2020. The necklace that is the centerpiece of this paper was passed to the reincarnations of mothers: Bla chen (1918-2004), who received the necklace from his mother, Mtsho mo (1883-1948), gave it to his elder brother, Snying byams (~1911-1976), to pass to the reincarnation of their mother, G.yang mtsho (~1958-2013; Snying byams' daughter). G.yang mtsho gave the necklace to her second daughter, 'Brug mo (b. 1988), believed to be G.yang mtsho's mother's reincarnation. 'Brug mo gave the necklace to her second daughter, Lha mo (b. 2019), believed to be the reincarnation of 'Brug mo's mother, G.yang mtsho. The paper is organized chronologically, tracking the necklace's history through Bla chen, Snying byams, G.yang mtsho, 'Brug mo, and Lha mo.

KEYWORDS

Tibetan mothers, Tibetan necklace, reincarnation, Tibetan lives (China), Tibetan family heirlooms

LOCATION: MAPS

FIG 1. Mtsho sngon Province, PR China (Wang 2014:1).



*Tshe dbang rdo rje (Caixiangduojie) and 'Brug mo skyid (Zhoumaoji). 2021. Tibetan Mothers of Three Generations: A Hundred-Year-Old Necklace. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 60:209-222.

FIG 2. Khri ka (Guide) County, Mtsho sngon Province (Xie 1995:1).

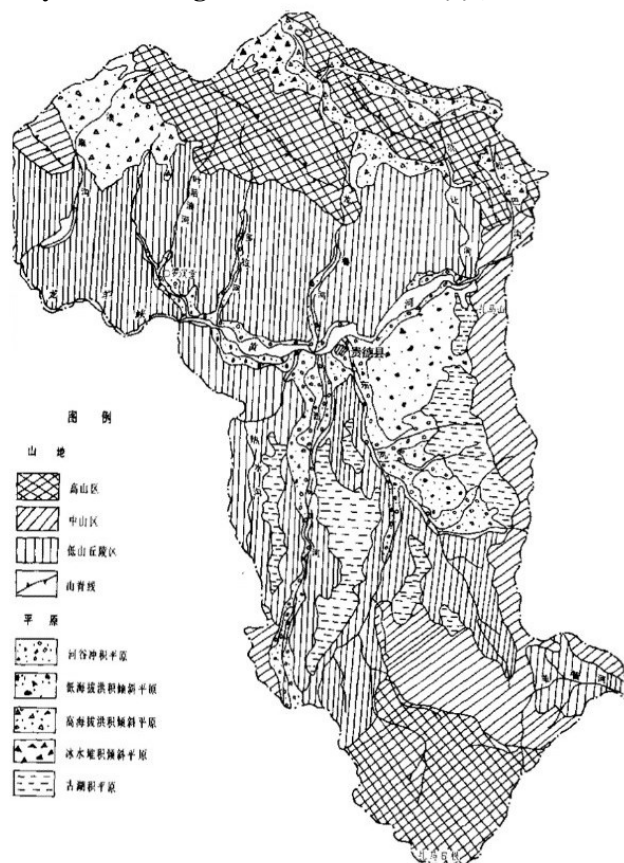


FIG 3. Chab cha Town, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.¹



¹ <https://bit.ly/3ghbImy>, accessed 4 December 2020.

FIG 4. People in the paper.

Name	Description
'Brug mo 'Female Dragon' (b. 1988)	G.yang mtsho's youngest daughter
Bla chen 'Master' (1918-2004)	'Brug mo's mother's father's younger brother; younger brother of Snying byams
G.yang mtsho 'Lake of Prosperity' (~1958-2013).	Mother of 'Brug mo and four other children; the third daughter of Snying byams
Jo ri 'Holy Mountain' (~1941-1999)	'Brug mo's father; eldest son of the last landlord, Mthun sgril rgyal, of Mo yag Village
Lha mo 'Goddess' (b. 2019)	'Brug mo's second daughter
Mthun sgril rgyal 'Victory of Unity' (~1911-1997)	'Brug mo's father's father; father of Jo ri
Mtshan grags 'Glory' (1668 ¹ -?)	'Brug mo's mother's father's younger brother's first reincarnation
Mtsho mo 'Ocean' (~1883-1948)	'Brug mo's mother's father's mother; mother of Snying byams, Bla chen, and three other children
Snying byams 'Kindness' (~1911-1976) ²	'Brug mo's mother's father; older brother of Bla chen; father of G.yang mtsho and four other children

INTRODUCTION

In December of 2011, G.yang mtsho, a Tibetan mother of three sons and two daughters, was kneading a dough ball with calloused hands in her smoky kitchen. Her one-year-old grandson was strapped to her back with a red sash. With a deeply wrinkled dark face, she said with a warm smile, "This [necklace] was given to me by my dear father. It has been passed down for three generations. It means a lot to me!"

The necklace has 108 white ivory beads with a tiny blue bag in the center that contains an attractive white pearl. According to G.yang mtsho's children, the necklace has been passed down in the family for at least four generations. It is part of the life narratives of their maternal great-uncle (Bla chen), their maternal grandfather (Snying byams), their mother (G.yang mtsho), G.yang mtsho's youngest daughter ('Brug mo), and 'Brug mo's second daughter (Lha mo).

Intrigued, we recorded accounts of the necklace, most of which were told by G.yang mtsho and her five children. 'Brug mo confided:

I often wear the necklace around my neck to nourish my skin. Occasionally, I wear it around my left wrist when praying and chanting. I have passed this [necklace] to my second daughter, Lha mo, my mother's reincarnation.

¹ Pu (1993:166).

² According to villagers, Snying byams died in the last year of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the same year his younger brother, Bla chen, returned home from prison.

BLA CHEN

Bla chen, recognized as the fourth reincarnation of Bla ma mtshan grags,¹ was born in 1918 in Dgon pa (Gongba) 'Temple' Village. His mother, Mtsho mo, gave him the necklace when he was seven years old when he went to Grwa tshang (Zhacang) 'Monk Family' Monastery.² Later, he was taken to 'Bras spungs (Zhebang) 'Rice Heap' Monastery.³

One cold morning in 1925, as thick snow fell, Mtsho mo was cooking breakfast when seven-year-old Bla chen said, "Mother, cook more. There'll be some guests."

"Oh, really!" replied Mtsho mo, who did as asked and prepared more food.

Bla chen urged his fourteen-year-old brother, Snying byams, to get up and clean the room. As soon as Snying byams finished cleaning, a frigid wind blew open the old squeaky wooden door. Three monks were dismounting in the yard.

The oldest monk gently walked to Bla chen, respectfully offered him a red cassock, and said, "My dear *bla ma*, it's time to return!"

Bla chen playfully put on the cassock and replied, "Yes, I know. Let's leave after breakfast."

His mother and brother had been regularly amazed by his foresight and humbly offered breakfast to the monk guests.

After breakfast, as Bla chen hugged his mother farewell, she took off her necklace and put it around his neck. Next, he hugged Snying byams and whispered, "Brother, be happy. We won't be able to see each other for a while, but we'll be together for a long time when it's time to return this necklace!"

Every day, Bla chen used the necklace as prayer beads for study and Buddhist practice.⁴ After some two decades, he was well-known in A mdo for his wisdom, compassion, and contributions to locals. He had many devotees; for example, in the autumn of 1938, a middle-aged Chinese merchant came to see Bla chen with his wife, who could not walk normally. The merchant reported that none of the many doctors they had consulted could diagnose or cure her illness. Bla chen kindly taught the couple a few Buddhist practices such as prostrations and mantra recitations. In less than a month, the merchant's wife had recovered. The merchant and his wife thanked Bla chen and offered many gifts, which Bla chen returned when the merchant and his wife were leaving. However, after they knelt on the floor and implored Bla chen to accept their gifts, he agreed and gave them to local villagers after the couple had left. Among the gifts, there was a white pearl that Bla chen tied to his mother's necklace.

Bla chen kept the necklace with the white pearl until his mother's death in 1948, the year before the founding of the People's Republic of China. According to local elders, Bla chen used the necklace to chant, pray, and divine during the seven days of his mother's funeral. Shortly after the funeral, he gave the necklace to Snying byams, saying that their mother would be reborn as Snying byams' daughter in about ten years at the start of a famine.

¹ According to villagers and Pu (1993:166-167), Mtshan grags and Bla chen were both born in Dgon pa Village. Mtshan grags was born in 1668 and Bla chen was born in 1918. They both were well-known spiritual advisors and teacher of *bla ma* in A mdo areas.

² Located in the upper north part of Dgon pa Village, it was the religious center of both Mo yag and Dgon pa villages in Khri ka County. Built in the 1420s, it was destroyed in 1867, rebuilt and expanded in the 1870s, destroyed again during the Cultural Revolution, and rebuilt in 1981 (Pu 1993:166-167).

³ The monastery was built by the Dge lugs Sect in 1416 at the foot of Mount Dge 'phel dbu rtse 'Virtue Increasing Peak' near Lha sa City. It was a political center with over 10,000 monks at its peak and one of the three great Dge lugs monasteries in Tibetan areas of China. 'Bras spungs resembles a huge pile of rice from a distance (Niu 2010:155-158).

⁴ Prayer beads are used to, e.g., count the number of prayers made and number of books read.

Bla chen's prediction came true. In 1958 at the beginning of the Great Leap Forward,¹ Snying byams had a daughter. In the following year, a big famine began. Hunger and starvation continued until the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

During this chaotic period, Grwa tshang Monastery was destroyed. Bla chen was imprisoned, criticized, forced to herd livestock, and urged to marry. He endured all criticisms and punishments, never scolded or fought back against others, and never abused the livestock he herded. Also, he did not break his monastic vows. In the words of a local, "He was the only local monk who upheld the Five Precepts² and remained unmarried in our village after the ten difficult years of the Cultural Revolution."

SNYING BYAMS

In 1948, Bla chen had given the necklace to Snying byams, whose wife, a decade later, delivered their fifth child, a daughter, G.yang mtsho. Although life was difficult, family members were delighted with the newborn baby, for they believed she was Mtsho mo reborn.

Snying byams wore the necklace under his upper clothing until the day of his death. When Snying byams played with baby G.yang mtsho or chanted with her sleeping in his arms, she smiled and giggled when Snying byams showed her the necklace.

In 1976, Bla chen was released from prison and returned home, delighting his family members, especially Snying byams and G.yang mtsho. Though G.yang mtsho had never met Bla chen, she behaved as though she knew him very well. G.yang mtsho's siblings commented that G.yang mtsho ran to Bla chen and kissed him the first time she saw him.

G.yang mtsho's siblings envied her for being favored by Bla chen and Snying byams, but they were also very good to her because they understood she was Bla chen and Snying byams' mother in her previous life.

On the day G.yang mtsho turned eighteen, the two brothers, Snying byams and Bla chen, went outside and sat cross-legged under the sun near the courtyard gate and chanted as usual. As G.yang mtsho walked by on her way to water the cows and donkeys, Snying byams spoke to her. Placing two wooden buckets of water on the ground, she bent forward. Snying byams joyfully announced, "My dear, you are now an adult, and I'm delighted to return your necklace!"

G.yang mtsho was overjoyed. She kissed her father's forehead, held the necklace in both hands, jumped around her father like a happy lamb, put the necklace around her neck and under her shirt, picked up the buckets, and continued with her chores.

Not long after watering the livestock, G.yang mtsho heard Bla chen calling her and other family members. Snying byams had passed away while sitting cross-legged, like an icon.

G.YANG MTSHO

After G.yang mtsho's mother passed away the following year, Bla chen took care of her. He taught G.yang mtsho to read and write Tibetan and chant many Buddhist mantras. In 1981, Grwa tshang

¹ Dayuejin 'The Great Leap Forward' was a movement of the extreme "left" line carried out by the Chinese Communist Party from 1958 to 1960 (Cheng 2013, Deng 2008, Zhu 2010). In 1959, the Three-Year Big Famine began, which resulted in the deaths of millions of people (Cao 2008, Li 2016).

² No killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and no intoxicants were essential for rebirth in human realms (Dawazhuoma 2014).

Monastery was rebuilt, and Bla chen was asked to care for the temple and work for the local government since he was highly literate and respected.

On a windy day in the spring of 1981, villagers and local government leaders came to G.yang mtsho's home to invite Bla chen to Grwa tshang Monastery. As Bla chen climbed into a green government jeep to leave, G.yang mtsho ran to him in tears and offered him the necklace. Bla chen gently stroked her head, saying, "Keep it. It'll bring you happiness," putting the necklace back around her neck, and whispered, "Give this to your mother. She'll rejoin you in the Year of the Dragon!"

Though G.yang mtsho didn't quite understand this, she was glad to learn she would be able to see her mother again.

During Dgun nyi rdog 'the Winter Solstice', G.yang mtsho gave birth to a child fathered by her lover, who lived twenty kilometers away in Ba lu (Wali) 'Rhododendron' Village. He visited her irregularly due to his family chores, poor road conditions, and lack of convenient transportation.

A month later, during the Lunar New Year, G.yang mtsho was tricked and taken to be Jo ri's¹ wife in Mo yag (Maoyihai) 'Beauty' Village,² far from her home and where she spent most of the rest of her life. In Mo yag Village, she gave birth to four more children. The youngest child, 'Brug mo, was born in the Dragon Year (1988), and G.yang mtsho then understood what her uncle had said years earlier.

According to 'Brug mo's elder sister, G.yang mtsho dreamed of her mother hugging her the night 'Brug mo was born. 'Brug mo's birth brought great joy to her parents, especially to G.yang mtsho, who believed 'Brug mo was her mother in her previous life.

In 1999, Jo ri passed away after a day of working in their wheat fields. G.yang mtsho explained that she had weeded the *tshod grwa*³ near the home while Jo ri sprayed wheat with paraquat⁴ near the Yellow River banks, about two kilometers from their home. As soon as Jo ri got home in the late evening, he was so hungry that he ate chunks of dried bread without changing his clothes or washing his hands. He passed away that night.

After Jo ri's death, G.yang mtsho's life became very difficult. Her three married children struggled over and eventually divided the family land, livestock, and money. G.yang mtsho refused to allow her elder sons to take 'Brug mo to their homes to care for their children. Most of the year, her elder sons and their wives left their homes for migrant work in Zi ling (Xining) and other urban areas. G.yang mtsho then looked after their children and did the herding, plowing, planting, irrigating, and harvesting work by herself and with 'Brug mo's help after school.

G.yang mtsho became ill from overwork, developed gastric cancer, lost half of her weight, and passed away in 2013. However, G.yang mtsho had been very happy in those years. 'Brug mo said:

We didn't have enough food and money, but we were happy. Mother often sang, danced, and chanted mantras, especially after supper when we both were on the *he rdzas* 'adobe bed platform'.

One sunny Sunday in 2007, I didn't have to go to school, so I helped herd our sheep in the mountains. Mother had a cold, and she had to irrigate the fields. As I was herding the sheep back home in the late afternoon, I got to where Mo yag Stream⁵ crossed the middle of our village and noticed a man following me. Sensing danger, I crept through the flock and started running. The man chased me. He was

¹ Jo ri was the eldest son of the last landlord (Mthun sgril rgyal) in Mo yag Village.

² Mo yag Village had seven families. The first landlord was Jo ri's paternal great-great-grandfather.

³ Enclosed by abode walls and often attached to or near the family yard, it was divided into small plots for vegetables, fruit trees, and flax.

⁴ A highly poisonous chemical used for grass and weed control.

⁵ The Tibetan name of the stream is Mo yag gram pa (Mo yag 'beauty' is also the village's name; *gram pa* 'stream'). The stream's water is from Glang klad (Langlei) 'Bull Skull' Valley and from Mgo rdo (Guoduo) 'Baldhead' Valley.

much faster than me. I knew he would soon catch me, so I rushed to the nearest home and into their household gate. Wrongly assuming the gate was unlocked, I bounced back and fell to the ground with a bleeding nose. I wiped away the blood with my dusty sleeves and crawled into a ditch underneath the family's orchard wall.

I didn't dare come out until I heard someone unlock the courtyard gate. It was sunset when I finally crept outside. The courtyard gate was open, and I heard the sounds of cooking. Feeling safe now and also hungry, I ran home. It was dark when I arrived. Mother was waiting. Weeping with joy that I'd made it back safely, Mother embraced me and said, "Dear, I was so worried about you! What happened?"

After I told her my story, she said, "I'm so sorry. I shouldn't let you herd sheep. There are many bad men like that ready to take advantage of older girls."

"It's OK. I'll be more careful next time. Let's go get our sheep."

"You're right! But let's have supper first. Maybe the sheep will come home by themselves."

After supper, we went outside, but we didn't find any sheep. I felt guilty for not taking better care of the sheep. When we got back inside our house, and on the *he sdzas*, Mother noticed I was not happy, so she made me laugh by singing and dancing. I was soon laughing because of her funny dance steps and songs. She sang, "I'll pray... pray with the most precious ivory necklace from my *bla ma*... wish all the lost sheep will be safe!"

The next day at dawn, trembling with fear, I woke up from a nightmare of that man chasing me. Mother was lying on her back, holding the necklace, and chanting. I knew that she couldn't sleep because of the lost sheep. I got up, put the basket patched with sheepskin on my back, and went out to fetch firewood for cooking. When I opened the gate, I saw all my family sheep lying on the threshing ground. I ran back and shouted enthusiastically, "Mother! The sheep are here! Your chanting is truly effective!"

Mother got out of bed, came outside, and together we counted the sheep. None were missing. We happily went back into the house and started cooking breakfast.

After breakfast, Mother put bread in my school bag for lunch. I kissed her forehead and said goodbye but, as soon as I had stepped out of the kitchen, I secretly put half of the bread near the kitchen window for Mother. We lacked flour, which often happened before harvest. Then I ran to school, which was about five kilometers away. When I walked, it took about an hour to get there.

I reached the school at about seven AM. No other students were in my classroom. I sat on my wobbly wooden stool with a cracked leg on the left side of the third row, put my bag in the desk, and started doing my homework. After a few minutes, other students began arriving and also worked on their homework. A half-hour later, I finished my homework and started reviewing for the first class.

Two boys whose parents worked in the local government office noticed I had finished the homework and dashed over to grab and copy it. One boy picked it up first, but before he reached his seat in the first row, the second boy snatched it from him and rushed to his seat, which was two rows behind me. The first boy furiously threw his ink bottle at the other boy, but it struck my face. Blood gushed from my nose and mouth.

Everyone in the classroom was astonished and soundlessly and fearfully gazed at me. In great pain, I wailed and fainted. When I regained consciousness, I was on a small cot in the township clinic near our school. A doctor was stitching my upper lip. I felt a lot of pain and wanted to get up, but my head, arms, and legs were strapped to the bed. My class teacher was tightly holding and comforting me.

After ten painful stitches, the doctor cleaned my face with cotton swabs soaked in alcohol and gave me an intravenous injection. Afterward, I felt better and walked home.

At dusk, Mother came home with the sheep. I ran to her and tearfully began telling her my story. She held my face in her hands, carefully examined my stitched upper lip, and hugged me tightly. She lamented, "Oh, *bla ma* [Bla chen]! What should I do? I asked 'Brug mo to live with me and attend school rather than caring for her brothers' children. Now, her beautiful face has been ruined at school!"

"Mother, it's not your fault! I wanted to be with you, and I'm delighted to be with you," I said.

She kissed my forehead and wiped away her tears. In the following weeks, she borrowed cash from neighbors to treat my wound in the county clinic. During this time, I also took the Gaokao 'National Level College Entrance Exam'.¹

After about two months, my lip had healed, and I also received a university admission letter, pleasing both Mother and me.

'BRUG MO

In 2006, 'Brug mo's relatives suggested that she marry after learning of her mother's poor health and difficult life. "Look at you! Weak and poor! Give 'Brug mo to a family and get a dowry for a better life."

G.yang mtsho was determined and declared, "I'll support her to attend school even if I have to sell everything, including my house!"

Luckily, 'Brug mo's high school English teacher visited her after she was injured. After registering her family's poverty, he said he would find someone to help her if she passed the college entrance exam.

In August 2007, G.yang mtsho sold all her sheep to meet 'Brug mo's school expenses. The next day, 'Brug mo's English teacher visited with his friend, Meimei,² from Tianjin. Meimei was astonished at the family's poverty and promised to pay 'Brug mo's college tuition for four years. With Meimei's help, 'Brug mo opened a bank account, and Meimei transferred the first-year tuition funds. After a few days, one of 'Brug mo's brothers noticed 'Brug mo's bank card and forcefully took it.

With G.yang mtsho's help, 'Brug mo retrieved the bank card, entered university, completed her BA study, and in July 2012 was awarded a high school English teaching certificate. In August, the next month, 'Brug mo passed the Tegang 'Special Post' examination for teachers³ and became an English teacher at 'Bras thang (Damitan) 'Rice Place' Town⁴ Primary School. During the winter holiday in 2013, 'Brug mo married, bought a pair of silver bracelets for her mother and brought her to live in Zi ling City.

G.yang mtsho's health dramatically improved after consulting doctors, taking medicine, and eating regularly. In March 2013, after two months of a comfortable life, her youngest son asked her to return to Mo yag Village to care for his second child. G.yang mtsho returned to live in her old, chilly house with her one-year-old grandson, doing endless family chores by herself.

The long distance between 'Brug mo's school and G.yang mtsho allowed her to visit only during holidays. During Qingming 'the Tomb-sweeping Festival' in April 2013, 'Brug mo visited G.yang mtsho and found her in poor health again. Concerned, 'Brug mo urged her to visit a hospital. G.yang mtsho refused with, "No need to waste money! Your youngest brother has already bought many precious Tibetan medicines!"

¹ Passing this examination at the end of the third year of senior high school is required for college/university admission. It began in 1952, was stopped during the Cultural Revolution, and restarted in 1977. The exam includes the subjects of Chinese, English, mathematics, arts (a combination of politics, history, and geography), and science (a combination of physics, chemistry and biology) tests (Wu 2007, Zhang 2017).

² Meimei studied at Tianjin International School. Her father was a businessman.

³ This program began in 2006 with the implementation of Chinese government policy targeting the lack of qualified teachers in rural areas. It aimed to reduce the gap between rural and urban education by creating special posts for teachers to meet the needs of compulsory education (Yi 2006).

⁴ At one time, rice was cultivated in this area where there was a relatively warm climate and abundant water from the Yellow River.

A month later, during the Wuyi 'Labor Day' holiday,¹ 'Brug mo again visited G.yang mtsho. Finding her health had deteriorated even further, she persuaded her to visit 'Qinghai Province People's Hospital'² where she was diagnosed with gastric cancer. After a month of hospitalization, G.yang mtsho insisted on returning to the village with, "I don't want to stay here... too many patients, too many deaths, and it's too expensive. I don't want to die here. I still have a home with my family deity and ancestors' souls in the village. I need to offer butter lamps and pray to them!"

In the early morning of the first day of October in the same year, 'Brug mo dreamed of her mother saying she was leaving. 'Brug mo woke up and anxiously phoned G.yang mtsho to find she was too weak to speak clearly. 'Brug mo and her husband rushed to the bus station with their one-month-old baby and reached the village in the late afternoon where, at the family home gate, they heard her eldest brother's chanting and drumming.

Inside the dilapidated house, they found G.yang mtsho lying on the adobe bed, surrounded by 'Brug mo's siblings. The eldest brother was chanting the *Mantra of Sgrol ma*³ while rhythmically ringing a vajra bell in his right hand and shaking a leather *Da ru* 'hand-drum' in his left hand. The other three elder brothers and the disabled stepbrother⁴ were smoking cigarettes made with tobacco wrapped in newspaper strips. The elder sister was washing 'brug *dkar* 'dragon-decorated' bowls. The three sisters-in-law were making *aka baozi* 'monk dumplings'.

'Brug mo huddled on the bed, holding her baby, and kissed G.yang mtsho's forehead. G.yang mtsho had lost much weight. She opened her eyes, looked at 'Brug mo and the baby, smiled, and gestured for 'Brug mo to sit by her.

After supper and the departure of 'Brug mo's siblings, G.yang mtsho asked 'Brug mo to remove the pillow⁵ beneath her head and take the necklace from around her neck. While holding G.yang mtsho in her arms, 'Brug mo carefully took the pillow and necklace and placed them on G.yang mtsho's chest. G.yang mtsho put the necklace around 'Brug mo's neck, pressed the pillow to 'Brug mo's chest, and whispered, "I'm so happy to have you. Keep these [pillow and necklace]. They're my life!"

'Brug mo nodded and kissed G.yang mtsho's hands with tears rolling down her cheeks. To make 'Brug mo happy, G.yang mtsho told a story of the necklace and then asked 'Brug mo to rest with her husband and baby in a bedroom adjacent to the *mchod khang* 'shrine room'.

Early the following day, G.yang mtsho passed away on the adobe bed but not before whispering to her eldest son, "I wish to be reborn in 'Brug mo's family."

After the funeral rituals that concluded seven days later, 'Brug mo's siblings argued over the family property, especially the land. They also forcefully took their mother's pillow from 'Brug mo, who had not checked its contents. 'Brug mo then left the village.

A few months later, during the Lunar New Year of 2014, 'Brug mo visited her siblings. Her elder sister secretly told her that a rusty metal pendant,⁶ eight one-*yuan* silver Yuan Datou 'Big Head

¹ A short form for Wuyi laodongjie 'May First Labor' Day', a national holiday in China. In 2013, it began on 28 April and ended on 2 May at 'Brug mo's school.

² According to locals, Qinghaisheng renmin yiyuan is one of the best hospitals in Mtsho sngon. See <https://baike.baidu.com/item/青海省人民医院/10712005?fr=aladdin> (accessed 21 October 2020) for more on this hospital.

³ The short name for one of the most popular Buddhist chants - "The Twenty-one Tara Mantra" - in Mo yag Village. According to locals and Huang (2015:31), it is often chanted for health and longevity.

⁴ His mother was Jo ri's first wife. His legs were paralyzed in childhood. G.yang mtsho (Jo ri's second wife) cared for him.

⁵ It was patched and probably had never been washed. According to Gyang mtsho's children, she kept her silver bracelets and coins in the pillow.

⁶ Most locals refer to it as *lo 'khor bcu gnyis* 'the twelve zodiac animals' because the front side features a mandala inside the zodiac cycle - rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and

of Yuan Shikai¹ coins, and a pair of silver bracelets were in their mother's pillow. Their eldest brother took them. 'Brug mo's elder sister also said that their eldest brother had given her a silver coin. She encouraged 'Brug mo to ask their eldest brother for coins. 'Brug mo thanked her elder sister and said, "No need. The coins should stay in our parents' home to bring better fortune."

On the last day of her visit, her elder brothers asked if their mother had given her an ivory-necklace. She said that she had and added, "I'll give it to the reincarnation of our mother!"

LHA MO

'Brug mo said, "Before Lha mo was born, I dreamed of Mother telling me that she was coming to stay with me."

One of 'Brug mo's nieces, living in Chab cha² (Qiabuqia) Town, said, "I dreamed of Grandmother just before Lha mo was born. She told me to visit her in Aunt 'Brug mo's home."

'Brug mo's eldest brother said Lha mo had their mother's birthmark - a brown thumb-size spot on her right leg.

On Lha mo's one-year birthday (16 November 2020), 'Brug mo put the necklace around Lha mo's neck and said, "Today you are a year old. This gift is for you. I hope you cherish it. It'll bring you good luck!"

Lha mo grabbed the necklace tightly with both hands, kissed it, smiled, giggled, and started biting it. She was believed to be the reincarnation of 'Brug mo's mother, G.yang mtsho.

pig. Other locals refer to it as *me long* 'mirror' because the reverse side is a mirror featuring *Aom*, the first letter of the Six Syllable Mantra.

¹ Imprinted with the head of Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), above which are six Chinese characters - *Zhonghua minguo sannian* 'the third year of the Republic of China' - in an arc. According to Xiong (2015:17-18), such coins were made in 1914, with each weighing 26.6 grams and valued at around 700 RMB in 2011.

² *Chab* 'water' and *cha* 'two' or 'pair'. A local villager suggested Chab cha means "Double River."

FIG 5. The ivory necklace (2017, Tshe dbang rdo rje).



FIG 6. The blue bag contains a white pearl (2017, Tshe dbang rdo rje).



FIG 7. The *lo 'khor bcu gnyis (me long)* from G.yang mtsho's pillow (2017, Tshe dbang rdo rje).



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TIBETAN TERMS

'bras spungs བསལ་སྤྱད་

ba lu བ་ལུ་

'bras thang བསལ་ཐང་

bla chen བླ་ཆེན་

'brug dkar འབྲུག་དཀར་

bla ma བླ་མ་

'brug mo འབྲུག་མོ་

chab cha ཆམ་ཆམ་

'brug mo skyid འབྲུག་མོ་སྐྱིད་

Da ru ད་རུ་

a mdo ཨ་མདོ་

dge 'phel dbu rtse དགེ་ཤེས་དབུ་རུ་ཅེ་

oM ཨོཾ་

dge lugs དགེ་ལུགས་

